

Lombroso Declares Dante Was Insane.

It Is an Alleged Scientific Conclusion for Which Nym Crinkle Sharply Takes the Theorist to Task.

PROFESSOR LOMBROSO has arrived at the scientific conclusion that Dante Alighieri was insane.

He has not reached this conclusion by taking Dore's illustrations to bed with him, but by a severe analysis of the poet's work. His opinion is that such conceptions of heaven and hell as Dante formed could only be the product of a mind made morbid and unreliable by its concentration upon purely subjective horrors.

The effort to shut this great genius up in the bedlam of the past is a curious one, and, if successful, must awaken some apprehension as to the coming literary doom of Goethe, Petrarch and Shakespeare. However, Lombroso is not first in the field. Dr. Durand Fardel long ago arrived at pretty much the same conclusion, only his methods of investigation were more purely critical. He arranged the different scenes of purgatory and hell in groups, extracted all the physical horrors and pronounced the result madmen.

It may be worth saying that this is something like an arraignment of the Middle Ages themselves, whose theologic concepts were pretty fairly the product of the imagination. What is remarkable in Dr. Durand Fardel, as it is in Lombroso, is that he cannot put himself into the time of which he is writing.

Renan is a disingenuous example of this inability to realize the conditions, moral and intellectual, in which the men of other ages worked. Gibbon himself constantly adjusted the crimes and the superstitions of Rome to a later judgment, without making any allowance for the individual and historic development of the Roman era. Dr. Durand Fardel brings to the terrible scenes in Dante's hell a nineteenth century sensibility, and then measures their morbidity by the sensitiveness of his own nerves.

It would be curiously fatal and unfair to subject Jonathan Edwards to this sort of process. It is very doubtful even if Shakespeare, who is for all time, could stand it.

IDEAS OF OTHER DAYS.

The whole of the Ghost's account of purgatory, or hell, in "Hamlet" is strangely discordant and materialistic to the now accepted theologic idea of hell. And there are plenty of incidents and descriptions in Shakespeare that can no more be acted before a mixed company of our day than the whole of the play can be read to an evening party of ladies and gentlemen.

Shakespeare is recklessly cruel and sensational at times, but it is extremely doubtful that the bear-baiting audiences of his time thought so, any more than they objected to their children looking at a man hung in chains. The fact is that neither Dante nor Shakespeare, who are for all time, could transcend them in an apprehension of spiritual facts which have been the result of ages of a slow refining process.

Dante, who is far more fervid and Renaissance than Milton, is scarcely more materialistic in his drama or his personages. In throwing their majestic scenes upon the canvas they used the light, or in other words, the knowledge of mankind, up to their time. And it is extremely doubtful if any historic teacher save one ever went beyond the conditions of evolution and apprehension that surrounded him.

Professor Lombroso does not approach this subject with the same literary patience that Dr. Fardel fondly believes he possessed. He comes at it with the knife of the physiologist and cuts his way to any number of corroborative facts in the life of Dante. One perceives that at the outset he is looking not for beauty, but for disease, and one almost instantly feels that such determination will be rewarded.

Poor Dante! We are now told that he was subject to epileptic fits. A man, it will be remembered, and the same valuable discovery in St. Paul, and now we come to think of it, there must be a trace of epilepsy in most of the great personages of the past, from Isaiah down to Joan of Arc, though the garnered testimony of history shows us that the foaming at the mouth and the gnashing of teeth in saint and sinner have not to the people of their time impaired their testimony or invalidated their stories.

A RIGHT AND A PROBABILITY.

A great deal of allowance ought to be made for Dante's effectism, but that is just exactly the allowance that a pragmatic servant, who is looking for a lesson and not for an inspiration, will not make. He is bound to have a post mortem exhibit, and it must be said that there is very little but the cadaver in his exposition. Dante had to take Satan off his canvas. He had also, though he was writing an epic, to make all the comprehension of his age. Just exactly how insane Dante's Satan looks to Lombroso, one must recall the description. It is that of a rare fowl: A bird so vast, falls never such I saw. Outstretched on the wide sea. No plumes had they, But were in texture like a bat, and these He flapped 'till the air, that from his head still came, was whirled in eddies round his wings. Was frozen. At six eyes he wept the tears Adown three chins distilled in bloody foam; At every mouth his teeth a stinger clamped. Bruised as with ponderous engine, so that three Were in this guile tormented.

A SURRENDER TO PROGRESS.

Milton's Satan, four hundred years later, has lost this carnivorous medievalism and has begun to evolve princely qualities. When we arrive at the eighteenth century Goethe robs him even of his hoofs and tail, and endows him with what Hazlitt called an "attorney intellect." The fact is that the world was slowly giving over the attempt to make the concept of evil objective. It had no Dantes who could do it with Florentine color, even if it desired such a thing, and it had in its imaginative work no more use for a forked-tail majesty or a

devouring bat than it had for unalms or battering rams. The devil and hell of Dante in the conceptions of men have been superseded. But they fitted into their time and place.

Dante's life was on the whole a sad one. One does not wonder that his imperial imagination dwelt upon forms of torture, for his body had been made to feel the cruelty of his age. Robbed, exiled, and crucified, he was to suffer upon his country an imperishable boon. No one can read the accumulated facts of his career, which centuries have unearthed with loving assiduity, without feeling that he had every warrant for mental aberration. But that warrant has never been discovered in his text by the generous world that has hung upon his words. That he was never suspected of insanity before French art came to his aid, and French science insisted on an autopsy, is worth nothing. Dore put him on the pedestal stage, and until a good deal of colored light and the probability is that millions of men know Dante only by what they have seen of Dore's pictures. These grisly illuminations which give us the hobgoblin side of medievalism, are wholly destitute of the philosophic insight, the plaintive and tender touches, and the matchless Tuscan music of the epic. No one can know Dante who has not read "The Vita Nuova," in which with the youthful ardor of a Romeo, he pours out his soul upon Beatrice, and lays bare with a candor that surpasses even Shakespeare, all the secret springs of a creative passion that inspired and beautified everything it touched.

A PLAIN IMPOSSIBILITY.

Lombroso can no more understand this noble dementia, which is as normal as the results of Spring, than his pupil Max Nordau can understand Coleridge or Wagner, or Mr. Robert G. Ingersoll can understand St. John. Nordau pronounced Kubla Khan the jargon of a disordered brain, and Swinburne has declared that it is the one matchless piece of supernaturalism in English verse. It makes all the difference in the world whether you look at inspiration through a stethoscope or a crystal. Lombroso tried to measure Dante's heart with a clinical thermometer. It reminds us of Tyndall's prayer gauge and Taine's academic measurement of Milton. One might as well expect Beardsley to illuminate Pascal or Mark Twain to translate the encomium moriae for a comic newspaper.

It is the duty now of precise science to search for the identities of madness and imagination. The standard of both health and ability is the prosaic. Dante was frangible, vain, given over to spells. In a word, he was mad. What better evidence of mental aberration. "The Divine Comedy" is a fine symptom of illness, and Lombroso is as happy as a country doctor who has discovered a case of appendicitis.

NYM CRINKLE.

THE STORY OF ONE BARREL

A Memorable Incident in the Latin Quarter Re-Celebrated in New York.

A certain art devotee of New York, who is also a prosperous business man, once upon a time gave up business cares and took a bold plunge into the joyous atmosphere of the Latin Quarter in Paris. There he went daily to the art school with the enthusiasm of any aspiring youngster still in his teens. He lived with the American students, sat with them at the frugal board of the Cafe des Arts, drank with them the wine that was blue and in all respects became one of them during that period of mingled legend and drudgery. The taste that he got of the bohemian life was distinctly to his liking, and this, together with the broader view of art which came to him there, amply repaid him for whatever losses his business suffered during his absence.

A paragraph or two will give an idea of the nature of these youthful recollections. Two spectres haunted my earliest years, the dread of midnight visitors and the visit of the doctor. I hardly knew when I was not subject to fears when I was left alone in the dark. These terrors were vague and different at different times. I do not say that I believed in ghosts, but yet that I disbelieved in their existence, but the strange sounds at night, the creaking of the boards, the howling winds, the footfall of animals, voices heard from a distance and unaccounted for—all such things kept me awake, restless and full of strange apprehensions. These fears lasted until, on the approach of adolescence, I became greatly ashamed of them. I do not say that I have got rid of these feelings, and to this day I sometimes fear a solitary house, for the fee simple of the whole departed form. I cannot describe the amount of worry I have had from this source. Perhaps the stories I heard from the country-bred inmates of our kitchen kept this feeling alive.

LETTER-WRITING WAS IRKSOME.

Concerning the letters of Dr. Holmes, Mr. Morse expresses the fear that his readers may think there is too much memoir and too little correspondence. "The fact is, that letter-writing was to Dr. Holmes an irksome task. Except to Motley and Lowell during their absences in Europe, he very rarely wrote spontaneously and in the way of friendship. His letters, it will be observed, were almost always written because some correspondent could not conveniently be left unanswered, or under the pressure of less mild compulsion of some special occasion. Therefore his letters are few."

The reader, however, is conscious of no shortcoming in this respect. There is a mass of correspondence, the greater part of which is addressed to the men and women most distinguished in the modern world of letters. The earliest letters are written in 1828, when Dr. Holmes was a youth of seventeen, and addressed to a friend, Palmetto Barnes, with whom Dr. Holmes corresponded during many years. In one of the first Dr. Holmes says, in speaking of himself: "When you come here you must not expect to see in me a strapping grenadier or a bearded son of Anak, but a youth of low stature and an exceedingly smooth face. To be sure, I have altered a little since I was at Dover. I wear my ill erect, and do not

Life Story of Dr. Holmes.

First Authentic History of the Genial Autocrat.

EVER since the announcement that an authorized life of Oliver Wendell Holmes was being prepared the appearance of the work has been awaited with unusual interest. The book will be ready for publication on the 9th inst., and through the courtesy of the publishers, Messrs. Houghton, Mifflin & Co., in furnishing the Journal with advance sheets, something may now be said of the work.

The author is Mr. John T. Morse, Jr., who has accomplished his task with the cordial co-operation of the relatives of Dr. Holmes. The two volumes are richly illustrated throughout and include the autobiographical notes and the correspondence of Dr. Holmes. Touching the autobiographical notes, after the genealogy occupying the opening pages, Mr. Morse says: "It has been somewhat widely believed that Dr. Holmes, for some time prior to his death, had been engaged upon an autobiography. In point of fact, he left only some disjointed notes and memoranda, in which he had not advanced beyond the period of youth, nor even covered that period thoroughly and consecutively. They were dictated at odd moments, without method, connection or revision. Naturally, therefore, they are rambling, disjointed and entirely fragmentary, and often overlap and repeat each other. It might be regarded as a biographer's duty to treat them as material out of which to construct a narra-

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